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Mongolian visit to Alaska Vigilant Guard continues partnership success

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — During Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014, members of Mongolia's National Emergency Management Agency visited to observe disaster response and coordination exercises, March 26-31.

The Mongolian representatives attended VG-AK14 as part of the National Guard State Partnership Program.

Alaska and Mongolia began their partnership in 2003 and conduct approximately six to eight joint exercises each year. The two regions were partnered due to their similarity in size, terrain, and natural disasters, with many citizens living in rural areas.

VG-AK14 is a regional, tactically focused exercise designed to test the response and coordination of different agencies from a disaster scenario earthquake and tsunami.

Each joint training exercise allows the two regions to exchange ideas and share practices to improve each other's operations when responding to a major disaster.

"They face a lot of the same challenges we do," said Maj. Alex Elmore, Alaska State Partnership Program coordinator.

This will be the first time Col. Ulambayay Nyamkhuu, city manager for emergency response at Mongolian's capitol Ulaanbaatar, and Maj. Ariunaa Chadraabal, an officer in the foreign cooperating division, visit Alaska to learn more about the National Guard's tactics and procedures in responding to a simulated earthquake.

The Mongolian representatives visited scenario-based events at multiple locations including Anchorage, Wasilla, Palmer Fairgrounds and the joint operations center at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. They observed scenarios including search and rescue training, hazard material detection and response, damage assessment and triage.

"It's to show them how we do emergency management in the United States ... how the military support the civilians when it comes to an actual response," said Elmore.

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At the Alaska Medical Station at Palmer Fairgrounds, Staff Sgt. Ned Tri, clinical noncommissioned officer-in-charge, explained the basic layout of the building and a walkthrough on what would happen if a person needed medical treatment at the facility.

"It's nice to see our counterparts from the different nations, especially [for them] to see what we do, what we are capable of doing," said Tri. "I hope that they can take some of that back with them to their countries and to their respective military operation."

When asked if the Mongolian representatives commented on any aspect of the exercise they found interesting, Elmore said that they were impressed with the cold weather clothing and equipment used at the rubble pile.

"They are the coldest capital city in the world on average, so their winters are worse than our winters," said Elmore. "So cold weather gear and equipment, able to work in this kind of climate, is very beneficial for them."

Soldiers and Airmen in the Alaska National Guard benefit from this partnership as well, and they travel to Mongolia and to operate and train in an unfamiliar environment.

"It makes our leaders and junior enlisted much more flexible and adaptable to a situation," said Elmore.

The Alaska National Guard will continue to enhance their partnership with Mongolia by sending a bilateral affairs officer to work at the embassy in Ulaanbaatar for a two-year tour.

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Photo cutlines

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Sgt. Wilfred Almeida, right, of the 207th Engineer Support Platoon, explains to Maj. Ariunaa Chadraabal, middle, and Col. Ulambayay Nyamkhuu, left, representatives from Mongolia, the features of using a mobile application to assess damage during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014, March 28. This is a regional, tactically focused exercise and will have multiple interagency field-training exercises that are focused on the response and recovery from a major earthquake and tsunami. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck

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Staff Sgt. Ned Tri, right, Alaska Medical Station clinical noncommissioned officer-in-charge, explains to Maj. Ariunaa Chadraabal, left, and Col. Ulambayay Nyamkhuu, middle, representatives from Mongolia, the contents of a medical bag used at the AMS during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014, March 28. This is a regional, tactically focused exercise and will have multiple interagency field-training exercises that are focused on the response and recovery from a major earthquake and tsunami. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck